

The Barnacle

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Summary: A brief moment of horror.

The Barnacle

Gordon Freeman stood with his face only a metre away from one of the black rope-like muscles that were suspended from man-sized barnacles all over the ceiling. On the underside of each was some sort of orifice surrounded by four black spikes.

The bottom of each dangling fleshy tube was about ten centimetres from the floor, the tips tilted upwards as if avoiding contact with the surface. It was twitching slightly, checking its suspension. This led him to believe it must be a retractable muscle. With his crowbar, Freeman tapped the muscle halfway down its descent.

The tentacle lurched in the direction of the crowbar and a pneumatic, hissing sound seemed to produce an energy wave along the muscle that neatly grabbed the tool from his hand. Freeman tore at the tentacle, and then pulled away in pain. His palms were bleeding. The tentacle was like a giant sticky willow. With a several sharp gasps from the gaping orifice, the crowbar was pulled upwards by the tentacle, and then clattered to the floor.

Having lost its grip on the useless item, the muscle dropped, quickly at first, and then settled back into its original position, just high enough for Freeman to retrieve the tool.

"No memory", he thought, realising that the animal had forgotten its loss. He didn't know whether this made the creature more or less repulsive.

He came to a decision fairly quickly when he noticed one of the creature's tentacles caught in a twitching cycle over a dismembered human leg. He recognised the protective hazard-suit legwear. He looked back up at the barnacle, the tentacle, the gaping orifice, and the black "claws". Like some sort of sly unearthly death threat to

his species, the suggestions of "tongue" and "teeth" filled him with horror, and for the first time since putting on the hazard suit, he felt naked.

Impulsively, he raised his shotgun at the command of his own horror, and blew a deep hole in the thick red flesh.

For a few seconds, the creature was indifferent. There was the tinkling of blood upon the metal floor. Then, with an exasperated hiss, the entire outer muscle prolapsed. Old blood splattered to the floor, and out hanged an arm, a head, a torso. A horrified white-coated man with broken, squint black glasses seemed to reach towards the floor, his skin red and apparently blistered. He had puncture marks around his waist. The muscle, now thinner, convulsed twice and the half-digested scientist fell to the floor.

From then on, nothing that moved horrified him more than the still, deadly chandeliers that perforated the ceilings of Black Mesa.

End
file.